

There Can Be Only One: An Analysis of Operational Artists in Vietnam

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

There Can Be Only One: An Analysis of Operational Artists in Vietnam, by MAJ Henry V. Hansen, US Army, 43 pages.

The Vietnam War remains a controversial war and continues to be the subject of much debate. GEN William Westmoreland's lack of strategic vision has been identified as the reason for losing the war, but this paper argues that this myopic view of events is unfounded. The author wrote on this subject to gain a greater understanding of Vietnam through the lens of Operational Art. The question this paper answers is "Who were the Operational Artists in the initial phases of Vietnam and were they successful in applying Operational Art?" Determining who had the creative leeway, and ultimately exercised Operational Art, is important in understanding the application of Operational Art in Vietnam. This understanding will benefit future Operational Artists and their staffs in understanding how to develop a strategy based on policy and negotiate for the "means." Operational Artists will then creatively apply these "means" in the "ways" they determine feasible.

The types of evidence that form the basis for this inquiry are personal accounts from the commanders analyzed, primary sources in the form of unclassified documents and reports, analysis from prominent historians and official histories. This study will evaluate potential Operational Artists by the following criteria: Authority, Responsibility, and Strategic Communications. The structure of the argument of this paper will be defining the term "Operational Art" and reviewing its history along with the history leading up to United States involvement in Vietnam to establish context. GEN Harkins and Westmoreland will be evaluated in this context by the proposed criteria, and their roles will be compared to recent Operational Artists and their performance in the Long War.

This study concludes several relevant points. GEN Harkins was not an Operational Artist despite his role as a Theater Commander because he was ineffective at strategic communication and did not meet the criteria of authority and responsibility. GEN Westmoreland, in contrast, was an Operational Artist in the same role as GEN Harkins because of the expanded authority and responsibility assigned to him. However, GEN Westmoreland's main point of failure was ineffective strategic communications. His failure to build a durable strategic narrative resulted in his eventual loss of public and policymaker support. Strategic communication is still relevant today because it has been the deciding factor in the success or failure of present-day Operational Artists.

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Acronyms

ADCON	Administrative Control
ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
APC	Armored Personnel Carrier
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
CINCPAC	Commander in Chief Pacific Command
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
COMUSMACV	MAC-V Commander
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JP	Joint Publication
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
MAC-V	Military Assistance Command Vietnam
NVA	North Vietnamese Army
PACOM	Pacific Command
ROE	Rules of Engagement
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SEATO	South-East Asia Treaty Organization
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
SECSTATE	Secretary of State
TACON	Tactical Control
USMACTHAI	United States Military Assistance Command-Thailand
VC	Viet Cong

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Section 1: Introduction

The Vietnam War serves as an apocryphal example of the US Army neglecting Operational Art and subsequently failing to achieve strategic objectives. The definition of Operational Art in ADP 3-0 specifies that it applies to any level of war and any formation that arranges tactical actions in pursuit of strategic objectives, but the term “Operational Art” connotes a certain degree of creativity in application. Determining who had the creative leeway, and ultimately exercised Operational Art, is important in assessing the application of Operational Art in Vietnam. This analysis will benefit future Operational Artists and their staffs in understanding how to develop an operational approach based on policy and negotiate for the “means” to execute this approach. Operational Artists will then creatively apply these “means” in the “ways” they determine feasible.

The joint definition of Operational Art is “The cognitive approach by commanders and staffs - supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity and judgment – to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to organize and employ military forces. [It] applies to all aspects of joint operations and integrates ends, ways, and means, while accounting for risk, across the levels of war.”¹ This is significantly different from the Army's definition in ADP 3-0. The ADP 3-0, defines Operational Art as “the pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose.” It continues with the assertion that “Operational Art is not associated with a specific echelon or formation, nor is it exclusive to theater and joint force commanders. Instead, it applies to any formation that must effectively arrange multiple, tactical actions in time, space, and purpose to achieve a strategic objective, in whole or in part.”² This implies that any commander and his staff can execute

¹ Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), II-3 – II-4.

² Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 9.

Operational Art, and their actions directly link to strategic outputs. The ADP 3-0 definition focuses on the actions of the commander to meet strategic objectives, or a bottom-up approach. Instead, this paper will look at a top-down construct of Operational Art, demonstrating that the “Art” in Operational Art is not something that can be defined in doctrine, which is inherently restrictive. This assessment will propose that true Operational Art is crafting operations from means that the artist negotiated for based on his/her personal and staff analysis. This includes the strategic communication and narratives constructed by Operational Artists, which will lead to the gain or loss of support for their approach by political leadership and their constituents. The Operational Artists are solely responsible for the outcomes, which differentiates them from all other military actors; they have responsibility for the outcome because they had the authority to negotiate for the appropriate means (given the policy constraints), and a higher military authority did not bound them.

The conflict of the definitions cited in doctrine above stems from the “integrating ends, ways and means” contrasted with “pursuit of strategic objectives . . . through the arrangement of tactical actions.” Integrating ends, ways, and means connotes a degree of control over these different aspects of strategy. JP 3-0 outlines the “ends” as the desired end state, the “ways” as the sequence of actions likely to achieve the ends, and “means” as the resources required.³ The narrow focus on arranging tactical actions does not address the critical aspect of determining the requirements to achieve those actions. ADP 3-0’s definition is solely focused on the “ways,” leaving a gap in the application of Operational Art. JP 3-0 also tasks commanders and their staffs with answering the question of the desired end states. This action is done in concert with national level leaders, determining policy objectives through discourse and strategic communication. JP 1-02 defines “Strategic Communication” as “Focused United States Government efforts to understand and engage key audiences to create, strengthen, or preserve conditions favorable for

³ JP 3-0, II-4.

the advancement of United States Government interests, policies, and objectives through the use of coordinated programs, plans, themes, messages, and products synchronized with the actions of all instruments of national power.”⁴ This process is represented in Figure 1, Operational Art. A further analysis of the genesis of the term Operational Art, and more importantly, its application, allows one to reframe the current doctrinal definition.

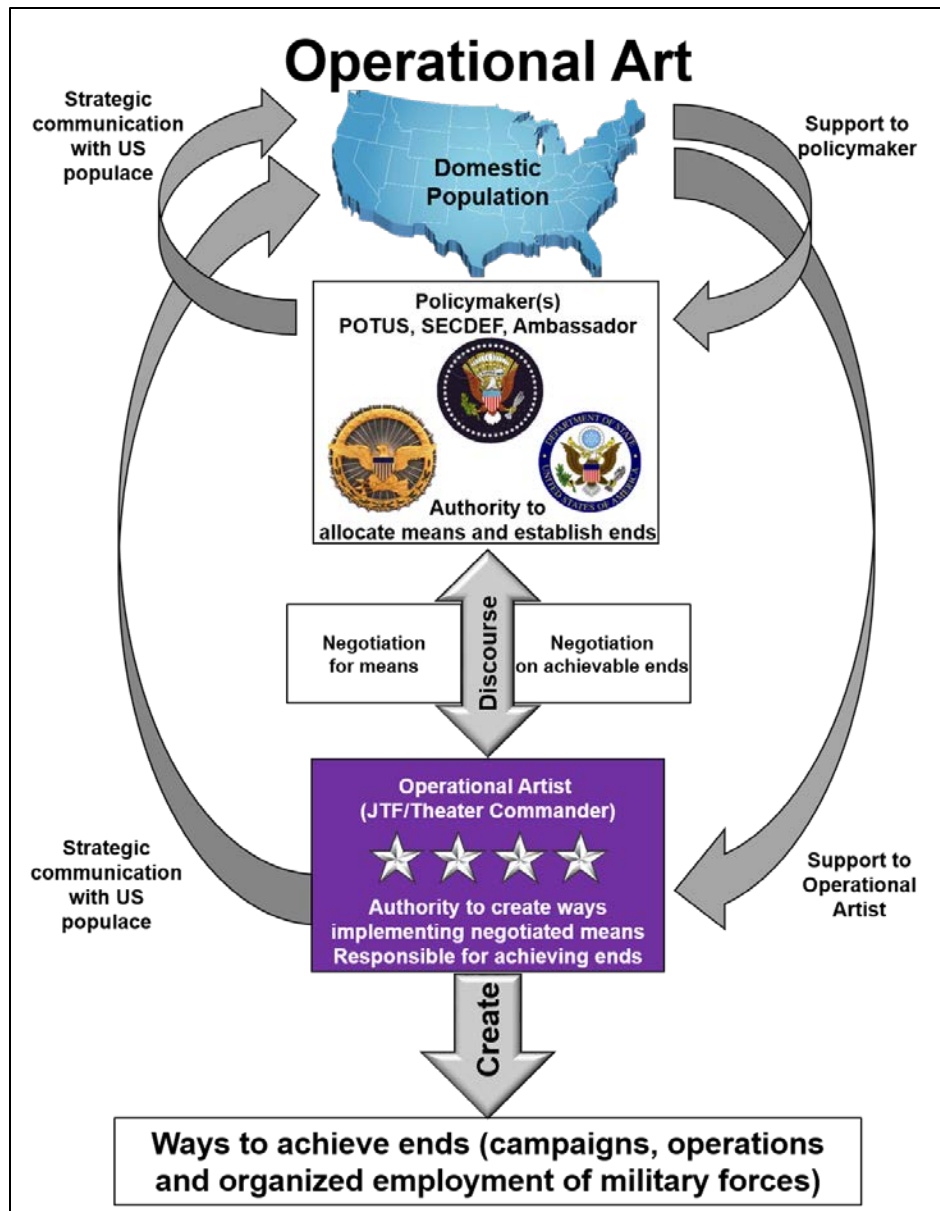


Figure 1. Operational Art.

⁴ JP 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 226.

Operational warfare and its' application, coined Operational Art, arguably emerged in the 19th century with the *levee en mass* of the French Revolution and the corollary Revolution of Military Affairs executed by Napoleon.⁵ Napoleon harnessed the potential of the massive military power at his disposal and unleashed it on the whole of Europe. His use of the corps system deviated from the previous practice of using a single army and provided him flexibility in the maneuver and employment of his forces. This flexibility required a mechanism to analyze the disparate situations of the army and produce direction, organizing the tactical actions of the corps in a coherent campaign plan. Napoleon's case is unique when observed through the lens of hindsight because he was the sole policymaker, strategist, and Operational Artist at the pinnacle of his rule. Napoleon did not have to negotiate for the means or translate the ends into achievable military objectives. He was the sole executive of his nation's policy and military power. Napoleon's case is useful for understanding the genesis of Operational Art and its context, but the Prussian iteration of Operational Art was much more akin to the current understanding of the definition.

Marshal Helmuth von Moltke fathered the initial construct of Prussian Operational Art. His work was the result of his analysis of history, as in Napoleon's method, as well as the experience of contemporary European Armies in the mid-nineteenth century, coupled with his profound understanding of the impact of the railroad and other newly emergent technologies on the conduct of warfare. Moltke was a more traditional Operational Artist in that he was only a military leader; he did not have the political power possessed by Napoleon to generate the means to execute ways and meet ends. Moltke was the Prussian Chief of Staff whose duty was interpreting the policy objectives of his political authority, Otto Von Bismarck, the Chancellor of

⁵ John Andreas Olsen and Martin van Creveld, "Introduction," in *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present*, ed. John Andreas Olsen and Martin van Creveld (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 2-3.

the Prussian Kingdom, appointed by the King.⁶ Large army formations, coupled with the mobility to arrange them in supporting, distinct positions on the battlefield, required a degree of creativity and skill in arrangement previously executed solely in the tactical, or “single battle” context. Moltke sought to execute flanking maneuvers with formations that had previously constituted entire armies designed for single battles. An important distinction regarding Moltke’s authority was that he technically had no authority over the field commanders in the Prussian army, who were crown princes. He derived his authority from Bismarck’s approval of his plans and campaigns through discourse and strategic communication, but he did not command troops directly.⁷ This distinction was a key difference between Moltke’s experience and the definition of the present-day Operational Artist.

Current US Army doctrine remains conflicted with joint doctrine regarding the mantle of Operational Art and who can wear it. This paper adopts the joint theme of the Operational Artist defined by their ability to create strategies and campaigns, integrating ends ways and means, which is in contrast to the all-inclusive ADP 3-0 approach. This ability to create strategies and integrate ends, ways, and means are the key traits of the Operational Artist. Leaders execute the creation and ordering of tactical actions in time and space at all levels, and if the definition of Operational Art is reduced to this function, the ADP 3-0 definition remains relevant. However, it is not within the capacity or authority of commanders at all levels to create strategies, campaigns, or to manipulate ends, ways, and means to achieve political objectives. For this reason, the duties and responsibilities of the Operational Artist are elevated, in the case of the Vietnam comparative study here, to the theater commander.

⁶ Dennis E. Showalter, “Prussian-German Operational Art, 1740-1943,” in *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present*, ed. John Andreas Olsen and Martin van Creveld (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 39-41.

⁷ Michael D. Krause “Moltke and the Origins of the Operational Level of War,” in *Historical Perspectives of the Operational Art*, ed. Michael D. Krause and R. Cody Phillips (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 2005), 119, 140.

The current example of the Operational Artist is personified in the Joint Task Force Commander who engages in discourse with the Secretary of Defense and/or President to determine war aims and negotiate for initial or additional means to meet those ends. This direct access to political leadership comes with the understanding that the Operational Artist is *responsible* for the outcome, and they are given the means to accomplish the objectives with this understanding. This commander has the authority to determine the ways to achieve these ends, but most important to the process is the creativity they must apply in determining the means necessary, negotiating for them and then crafting ways with the means given. This creativity is the mark of the Operational Artist, fostered by experience and talent, and not bound by set doctrines or teachings.⁸ The *art* in Operational Art is the application of his judgment bound only by his authority and responsibility for the accomplishment of the political aim. This application manifests itself in many forms, from troop formations and deployments, to rules of engagement, which are an unvarnished form of “ways” given they dictate what can and cannot be done in the theater. Strategic communication and the engagement with political leadership is the other aspect of this art. This direct dialogue with political authority, and the indirect discourse with the public through the media, is equally as important as the construction of operational approaches. This support from leadership and the US population is a critical “means” that enables the Operational Artist to sustain the execution of operations. This provisional support is contingent upon the ability of the Operational Artist to construct narratives that reinforce their operational approaches and weather unforeseen circumstances that are inherent in war.⁹

This study establishes the lens, or criteria, for the assessment of Operational Art, while also identifying the effects of constraints, authorities (or lack thereof), responsibility, and how they apply to the Operational Artist. This analysis identifies the Operational Artist as the

⁸ G. Stephen Lauer, “The Tao of Doctrine,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 82 (3rd Quarter 2016), 121-122.

⁹ Jeffrey J. Kubiak, *War Narratives and the American National Will in War* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 155-158.

individual who possesses the authority to negotiate for and employ the means, the responsibility for the ways in which the means are employed, as well as strategic communication. These are the deciding factors in identifying the true Operational Artist in the Vietnam case study as well as future conflicts. This is where the creativity that defines the artist resides. Establishing command directives like Rules of Engagement effectively constrain the ability of units under the command of the Operational Artist because it dictates what they can and cannot do. The Operational Artist interprets the requirements of the policy posited by civilian leadership and negotiates for the required means to execute ways and meet ends. The confidence of the public and civilian leadership is part of these negotiated means, and strategic communication is one of the most important activities executed by Operational Artists. This is the defining difference between successful and unsuccessful Operational Artists in the sense this monograph proposes.

This is a comparative case study between GEN Paul Harkins and GEN William Westmoreland centered on their respective roles in Vietnam. The background of the concept of Operational Art will be supported by Joint and Army Doctrine (ADP and JP 3-0) as well as excerpts from *The Evolution of Operational Art* by Dennis Showalter and Martin Van Creveld. Historical works on the War in Vietnam include, *MAC-V – The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation* by Graham Cosmas, and Stanley Karnow's *Vietnam: A History* will provide the backbone for historical context. The majority of evidence supporting this analysis will be personal accounts, records of the discourse between political and military leadership, and official documents. Interviews with GEN Harkins after the war, along with the records from the Joint Chiefs of Staff during his tenure and excerpts from the "Pentagon Papers" (cited under the title of the original document - *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967*) provide the breadth of information to evaluate Harkin's performance. Naturally, there is a significant amount of literature evaluating Westmoreland's performance, but the evidence used in this analysis provides a balance against the apocryphal accounts that paint Westmoreland as an attritionist lacking strategic vision. Instead, Westmoreland's account in *A Soldier Reports* is supported by Dr. Gregg

Daddis's *Westmoreland's War*, which includes evidence from the North Vietnamese perspective that refutes any notion that Westmoreland's methods were ineffective. Documentation from Westmoreland's orders dispel any myths about a solely attrition-based focus. Finally, former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates' book *Duty* will provide an analysis of the performance of recent Operational Artists to demonstrate that the lessons from Operational Art in Vietnam are still applicable today.

This monograph contrasts the authorities and orders of GEN Harkins with GEN Westmoreland to demonstrate that GEN Harkins was not the Operational Artist during the initial phases of American engagement in Vietnam, and GEN Westmoreland was an Operational Artist because of his authority to negotiate for the "means" and the responsibility to determine the "ways" for their employment. Both criteria and that of strategic communication are met by Westmoreland and not Harkins, but both fail due to ineffective strategic communication. Finally, this analysis will critique both generals' performance as Operational Artists and contrast them with the performance of recent Operational Artists in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. This assessment yields lessons for future Operational Artists and their staffs in constructing operational approaches and negotiating for means in the form of resources while executing strategic communications to gain and maintain political support.

Section 2: Historical Context and General Harkins' Tenure as the MAC-V Commander

The French Indochina War

The genesis of the Vietnam conflict stemmed from the nationalistic fervor prevalent in colonial nations around the globe after WWII.¹⁰ Vietnam, a French colony, fell prey to a rising communist insurgency led by Ho Chi Minh, known then as the Viet Minh, fighting as a nationalist response to French re-imposition of colonial rule after the evacuation of Japanese forces.¹¹ This led to war between France and the Viet Minh in 1946 that lasted until 1954. France requested assistance from the United States in 1945, citing a need for military and diplomatic support to end the resistance in Indochina.¹² President Roosevelt had no desire to assist the French and set the precedent for the following administration under President Truman.¹³ The Geneva Accords temporarily resolved the dispute with a negotiated settlement on July 21, 1954, but they ultimately precluded the unification of Vietnam and perpetuated the conflict.¹⁴ The final outcome of the conference declared the 17th Parallel was provisional until the results of the elections set for July of 1956.¹⁵ The intent of this bifurcation of Vietnam was to halt hostilities immediately, with the success of the future elections as a secondary, if not arbitrary, objective of

¹⁰ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1984), 147; Bernard B. Fall, *Street Without Joy* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1972), 22.

¹¹ Walton S. Moody, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the First Indochina War, 1947-1954* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, 2004), 5-6.

¹² US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part I- Vietnam and the US, 1940-45* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1971), A-16.

¹³ Ibid., A-20 – A-21.

¹⁴ US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part III- The Geneva Accords* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1971), D-12, D-26.

¹⁵ Ibid., D-8, D-26.

the attendees.¹⁶ The South Vietnamese did not subscribe to the division between the North and the South and did not accede to the temporary nature of the boundary.¹⁷ The former Viet Minh, now North Vietnamese, conceded considerable territory and military advantage, but their intent after the accords was to continue the pursuit for unification with military and/or political force.¹⁸ An important aspect of this settlement was the military context in Vietnam.

The French suffered a crippling defeat at Dien Bien Phu, an example of the Viet Minh transitioning to full-fledged conventional warfare from unconventional war to achieve strategic objectives.¹⁹ Viet Minh leadership had been aware of the impending Geneva Conference and seized the initiative to place France in a position of weakness at the negotiating table.²⁰ The US administration, under President Dwight Eisenhower, abstained from intervening in the Dien Bien Phu siege with US military power and chose to accept the outcome of the settlement due to his unwillingness to act unilaterally without congressional support.²¹ The resulting division of Vietnam from the conference was intended as temporary in nature, but in practice, it set the stage for the coming conflict between the North and South Vietnam and the intervention of the United States.²²

¹⁶ US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part III- The Geneva Accords*, D-24.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, D-25.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, C-12 – C-13.

¹⁹ Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1962), 62-63.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

²¹ US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part I- Vietnam and the US, 1940-45*, A-6.

²² *Ibid.*, 8.

United States Involvement in Vietnam from 1954 – 1962

President Eisenhower made the deliberate decision to commit the United States to preserving South Vietnam and other non-communist states in the region after the situation deteriorated in 1954 and required, in his assessment, extraordinary measures.²³ His administration expanded United States presence in the area by assigning additional responsibilities to the Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), which had previously been augmenting French efforts in Vietnam.²⁴ Eisenhower's administration assigned the MAAG the additional responsibilities training non-communist forces in the region and pledged to defeat any communist elements that infringed on the sovereignty of non-communist states.²⁵ This declaration firmly cemented the policy of the next three administrations and committed the United States to the survival of South Vietnam's government and the surrounding Southeast Asian states of Laos and Cambodia.²⁶ The South Vietnamese held a referendum that deposed the sitting president, Bao Dai, and replaced him with Ngo Dinh Diem.

The United States remained in Vietnam and focused on creating a capable South Vietnamese Army to withstand a conventional invasion across the 17th parallel. The two initial MAAG-Vietnam chiefs were LTG John O'Daniel and LTG Samuel Williams from 1954-1955 and 1955-1960, respectively.²⁷ Their focus was training and equipping an Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) that could withstand an initial offensive long enough to be reinforced by

²³ Willard J. Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Prelude to the War in Vietnam 1954-1959* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, 2007), 35.

²⁴ US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part IV- Evolution of the War* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1971), U.

²⁵ Graham A. Cosmas, *The United States Army in Vietnam: MAC-V – The Joint Command in the Years of Escalation, 1962-1967* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2006), 9-10; George S. Eckhardt, *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control, 1950-1969* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2004), 11-12.

²⁶ Douglas Kinnard, *The War Managers* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 16.

²⁷ Eckhardt, *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control*, 11, 14.

allies from the South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO).²⁸ Both MAAG commanders assumed the capability for these conventional Vietnamese forces to transition between conventional and counterinsurgency operations while also operating under the assumption that the conventional threat from the north was the greatest.²⁹

This context is relevant to the situations GEN Harkins and GEN Westmoreland faced because they illuminate the capabilities and approach of the North Vietnamese in their embryonic form as the Viet Minh while highlighting the United States' measured response, which was not lost on the North Vietnamese for the rest of the war. Ho Chi Minh made the declaration on April 24, 1956 that military force would be necessary to reunite Vietnam.³⁰ The North Vietnamese confirmed their capacity and willingness to shift between conventional and unconventional warfare based off of their relative capabilities and the strategic situation.³¹ The North Vietnamese also demonstrated that they could mass combat power, and the events at Dien Bien Phu resonated with future American commanders.³² The threat of a massed conventional attack shaped the approaches of the MAAG Commanders for the duration of the Eisenhower administration and led to the oversight of the bubbling insurgency in South Vietnam fueled by the Vietcong operating in the countryside.³³ US planners anticipated massed conventional Chinese intervention akin to the Korean conflict and did not account for the North Vietnamese adjusting off of this precedent and

²⁸ Eckhardt, *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control*, 15-19; Cosmas, *The United States Army in Vietnam*, 11.

²⁹ Cosmas, *The United States Army in Vietnam*, 11.

³⁰ BDM Corporation, *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam*, vol. 1, *The Enemy* (McLean, VA, 1979), 1-8.

³¹ Andrew F. Krepenevich, Jr, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 177-178.

³² Karnow, *Vietnam*, 552-553.

³³ BDM Corporation, *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam*, vol. 5, *Planning the War* (McLean, VA, 1979), viii.

implementing guerilla warfare in the South.³⁴ The Eisenhower response (or lack thereof) to the Dien Bien Phu incident was an indicator of the interest the United States accredited to the Vietnam theater and the subsequent operational approach was constrained by the administration's policies.³⁵ The Eisenhower administration transferred the Vietnam problem to the Kennedy administration, which soon discovered that the situation in Vietnam was stalled and an insurgency was in its infancy.

The North Vietnamese had fostered an indigenous insurgency in South Vietnam from 1957-1961 with the support of Russia.³⁶ The United States was largely unaware of the campaign and continued to prepare for a conventional invasion akin to the Korean War across the 17th parallel until 1960.³⁷ The United States began increasing military assistance to Vietnam and implemented a Counterinsurgency Plan in 1961. This approach focused on increasing the number of ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) forces with US funding and additional military aid in the form of training and advisors. These advisors trained ARVN forces in the concept of pacification, which focused on capturing territory from insurgents while garnering support from local inhabitants.³⁸ The Kennedy administration recognized the communist insurgency in the South as an attempt by the Soviet Union to circumvent the policy of containment by fighting proxy wars.³⁹ The administration executed the recommendation from General Taylor, Kennedy's special military representative tasked with assessing Vietnam in 1961.⁴⁰ Taylor recommended

³⁴ BDM Corporation, vol. 5, 3-21.

³⁵ Webb, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff 1954-1959*, 3.

³⁶ Ibid., 114.

³⁷ Ibid., 124.

³⁸ James L. Collins, *The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army, 1950-1972* (Washington, DC: Departments of the Army, 1975), 20-22.

³⁹ US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part IV*, 6.

⁴⁰ US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part V- Justification of the War* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1971), 578.

that the United States expand its role as advisors to become active participants in South Vietnamese government and military operations.⁴¹ Taylor also recommended that the United States allocate additional military forces numbering 8000 strong to augment the capability of the ARVN. Kennedy ultimately rejected the deployment of the full 8000 ground personnel because of its potential effects on the concurrent negotiations in Geneva with Laos in November of 1961.⁴² Kennedy continued the national policy of allocating as little military effort and force as possible to the Vietnam theater.⁴³ However, the growing number of troops in theater required an expanded headquarters, which ultimately resulted in the establishment of Military Assistance Command – Vietnam (MAC-V).⁴⁴

This new headquarters took a direct role in controlling all military forces in Vietnam while also coordinating with and advising the South Vietnamese Government in governance and military operations. This expanded role came into conflict with the country team and ambassador's authority in the theater. The solution was shared authority between the ambassador and the MAC-V commander. GEN Harkins assumed command of MAC-V and its responsibilities with the creation of the command on 8 February 1962.⁴⁵

General Harkins Role as the MAC-V Commander

MAC-V was formally established in early 1962, with GEN Harkins as the designated Commander.⁴⁶ Despite this title, Harkins does not fit the role of the Operational Artist because he failed to meet the criteria of responsibility and authority and performed poorly in his role due to

⁴¹ US White House, *Report on General Taylor's Mission to South Vietnam*, by General Maxwell Taylor (November 3, 1961), 8.

⁴² Cosmas, *The United States Army in Vietnam*, 20; Jack Schulimson, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam: 1960-1968, Part 1* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, 2011), 137.

⁴³ US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part V*, 592.

⁴⁴ Eckhardt, *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control*, 27.

⁴⁵ Cosmas, *The United States Army in Vietnam*, 27.

⁴⁶ Eckhardt, *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control*, 27-28.

inadequate strategic communications. There was confusion regarding the command relationship between GEN Harkins and Ambassador Nolting, but they both developed a working, healthy relationship regardless.⁴⁷ GEN Harkins was responsible for operational control of all US military functions in South Vietnam, including Air Force elements and the MAAG, and he was designated as the voice for CINCPAC regarding issues of military policy, planning and “contemplated” force employment.⁴⁸

The key aspect of this message from CINCPAC was the term “contemplated,” meaning forces that were considered, or projected, but not allocated. This was an indication that he had some semblance of control once these forces were allocated, but it does not indicate that he could request the deployment of additional forces on his own authority. In essence, he had the authority to make recommendations to CINCPAC, who negotiated for the resources with civilian leadership.⁴⁹ This authority was not true authority in the sense that Harkins sent requests that were scrutinized by CINCPAC before they were forwarded to the policymaker who could grant or deny resources. Harkins’ relationships with the Ambassador and CINCPAC were only further complicated with his relationship with the South Vietnamese government and military.

Harkins held an advisory role with Saigon Political Leadership on “all matters relative to . . . maintaining internal security in South Vietnam and to the organization and employment of the RVNAF and of counterinsurgency and other paramilitary forces,” while also “assist[ing] and support[ing] the Government of Vietnam in its efforts to provide for its internal security, defeat Communist insurgency, and resist overt aggression.”⁵⁰ This entailed working with the

⁴⁷ Paul D. Harkins, interview by Ted Gittinger, November 10, 1981, transcript, Frontline Diplomacy, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, accessed November 22, 2016, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000475/>; Schulimson, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam: 1960-1968, Part 1*, 174.

⁴⁸ Schulimson, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam: 1960-1968, Part 1*, 186.

⁴⁹ Eckhardt, *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control*, 29.

⁵⁰ Cosmas, *The United States Army in Vietnam*, 35.

Government of South Vietnam and coaching them in combatting the Viet Cong and reforming their government. Harkins had no leverage on South Vietnamese political leadership with the exception of the ability to withhold funding from certain military projects.⁵¹ This dual-pronged purpose only served to exacerbate a contentious political debate over the status of MAC-V as a theater command.

The Joint Chiefs took exception to McNamara's plan regarding the inception and reporting chain for MAC-V. Originally, McNamara intended for MAC-V to report directly to him, bypassing PACOM and consultation through the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Both Admiral Felt, CINCPAC, and Admiral Anderson, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), balked at this proposal by the SECDEF, proposing a subordinate unified command under the command of CINCPAC.⁵² Their reasoning was that the ground forces deployed to South Vietnam were not significant enough to justify a theater command coupled with the idea that South Vietnam was tied to the rest of the PACOM AO, requiring PACOM oversight.⁵³ However, McNamara intended to manage the conflict through face-to-face interactions with the MAC-V commander despite his acquiescence to the chiefs' recommendations.⁵⁴ McNamara's initial plan intended to give Harkins the dialogue with the SECDEF to negotiate for means and resources, but the interference of CINCPAC and the CNO prevented Harkins from this channel of strategic communication. Harkins responsibilities expanded as the war progressed, but he continued to lack the authority to craft and execute means to meet these responsibilities.

⁵¹ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *The McNamara Ascendancy, 1961-1965* (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2006), 265.

⁵² Cosmas, *The United States Army in Vietnam*, 37.

⁵³ BDM Corporation, *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam*, vol. 6, *Conduct of the War* (McLean, VA, 1979), 11-41.

⁵⁴ Cosmas, *The United States Army in Vietnam*, 39.

ADM Felt expanded Harkins' authority in 1962 by placing him in command of the newly minted USMACTHAI, a command responsible for Thailand.⁵⁵ This, in effect, made him the regional commander of Southeast Asia, responsible for South Vietnam and Thailand.⁵⁶ Despite this regional authority, GEN Harkins did not have complete control over all operations and assets in the area.⁵⁷ Harkins eventually assumed operational control over all Air Force operations in Southeast Asia through his Air Force component command, but he could not exercise control over any other services in the PACOM theater that originated outside of Vietnam. Authority for this remained in the hands of the Theater Commander, the CINCPAC.⁵⁸ The SECDEF delegated complete planning authority to GEN Harkins for the Southeast Asian Region, but GEN Harkins experienced considerable interference from multiple echelons, frustrating his control of operations in South Vietnam. The SECDEF, the JCS, and the CINCPAC consistently tampered with MAC-V's operations in efforts to monitor and promote their respective interests. Harkins noted that these self-serving interventions confounded his efforts and led to a dysfunctional chain of command.⁵⁹ This reinforced the point that Harkins did not exert full authority for operations, despite his assigned responsibility. Several specific instances demonstrate the CINPAC's unwillingness to relinquish the authorities inherent to an Operational Artist to GEN Harkins.

ADM Felt retained control of key aspects of operations in South Vietnam through his PACOM service component commanders. A prime example of this was Felt's denial of GEN Harkins request to convene General Courts-Martial, which Felt delegated to his component

⁵⁵ BDM Corporation, *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam*, vol. 6, 11-9.

⁵⁶ Eckhardt, *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control*, 30.

⁵⁷ Cosmas, *The Army in Vietnam*, 40.

⁵⁸ BDM Corporation, *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam*, vol. 6, 11-54 – 11-55.

⁵⁹ Schulimson, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam: 1960-1968, Part 1*, 186.

commanders.⁶⁰ ADM Felt also intervened in matters of task organization, operational planning, and MAC-V's management of the MAAG.⁶¹ This meddling caused concern with President Kennedy, who eventually dispatched GEN Taylor to remedy the issue.⁶² GEN Harkins did not raise concern with ADM Felt's interference and noted that he (Harkins) relied on PACOM for sustainment, but GEN Taylor addressed it with ADM Felt regardless.⁶³ ADM Felt continued to intervene and manage the command relationship between MAC-V and the MAAG, despite MAC-V's command authority over the MAAG. Felt ensured that the MAAG reported to him, the JCS and the SECDEF in their efforts, which truncated the authority of GEN Harkins.⁶⁴ The MAAG eventually morphed into the MAC-V organization near the end of Harkins tenure.⁶⁵ A final example of GEN Harkins' frustration lay in the US Government support of the coup against President Diem.⁶⁶

GEN Harkins opposed to the coup against Diem, but the fact that the actions by Ambassador Lodge, his newly appointed boss, were kept completely hidden from GEN Harkins made it difficult for him to influence the conduct of military operations under the authority of MAC-V.⁶⁷ GEN Harkins noted in his message to GEN Maxwell Taylor that he was unaware of Ambassador Lodge's support and actions to initiate the coup, citing their strained working relationship as an inhibitor to coordinated action.⁶⁸ GEN Harkins also noted that he was actively opposed to the coup and cited previous directives that clearly gave him the authority to manage

⁶⁰ Cosmas, *The Army in Vietnam*, 41.

⁶¹ BDM Corporation, *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam*, Vol. 6, 11-46 – 11-47.

⁶² Schulimson, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam: 1960-1968, Part 1*, 41.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Eckhardt, *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control*, 42.

⁶⁶ Cosmas, *The Army in Vietnam*, 43.

⁶⁷ US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part V*, 595.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 597.

military matters in South Vietnam, implying a clear violation of authority.⁶⁹ This event highlights several key points for the analysis of Harkins as a potential Operational Artist.

Analysis of GEN Harkins' Application of the Operational Art

The strained relationship between Ambassador Lodge and GEN Harkins exposed the inadequacy of the lack of clear lines of authority between GEN Harkins and Lodge's predecessor, Ambassador Nolting. The amicable relationship between Harkins and Nolting allowed them to maintain their separate spheres of authority in a functional partnership. However, Lodge's actions and communication through the Secretary of State denied GEN Harkins the authority of negotiating for means and crafting ways. The unique nature of a coup against a standing government caused confusion in execution as a military or political responsibility. Lodge assumed the role of the Operational Artist by initiating the coup and excluding GEN Harkins from the process until it was too late for Harkins to intervene. Ambassador Lodge negotiated for the authority, or ways, and retained the responsibility to execute the President's policy in South Vietnam.⁷⁰

The authority that GEN Harkins maintained was more in line with the ADP 3-0 definition of an Operational Artist (organizing tactical actions to achieve strategic objectives), although it is a tenuous connection at best. GEN Harkins was responsible for all of the US Military personnel in Vietnam, and maintaining limited authority over the air component operating in his area of operations. The nature of his advisory role to the Vietnamese made the action of advising ARVN forces a questionable form of arranging tactical actions. GEN Harkins influenced ARVN operations through his advisory role, but he was never in a position to negotiate for more US troops or means to accomplish the objectives outlined in policy. This authority remained with the

⁶⁹ US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part V*, 595.

⁷⁰ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 305-306; US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part V*, 604.

CINCPAC, although the SECDEF and other political leaders did, on occasion interact directly with GEN Harkins during his tenure as the MAC-V commander.

The most significant criticism of GEN Harkins and his performance as the MAC-V Commander was his overly optimistic appraisal of the situation in South Vietnam.⁷¹ His reports espoused a steady progress that did not reflect the assessments of the numerous missions and official visits from various agencies and staff positions.⁷² A dispute between GEN Harkins and Ambassador Lodge regarding Lodge's attempt to manage all interactions with US government (including military) officials brought the situation to a head. GEN Harkins attempted to reassert his presidentially-approved authority to interact directly with South Vietnamese leaders on internal and external security (implying no required oversight by the State Department, i.e. Lodge), when Lodge issued a directive assuming control of all United States to South Vietnamese Government interactions.⁷³ This quarreling coupled with the loss of faith in the integrity of Harkins' reports after the battle at Ap Bac led the Johnson administration to identify his replacement, LTG Westmoreland, and promptly remove GEN Harkins from theater.⁷⁴

Although US political leadership identified GEN Harkins as the MAC-V Commander with responsibility for managing all US military actions in theater and advising the host nation's military government, he exerted only incomplete and limited authority over US military actions. The existing command relationships required that he negotiate with CINCPAC for additional means and for approval for the campaigns and operations he assisted the Vietnamese in executing. He did not maintain the authority to negotiate with the final policy-making approval

⁷¹ Lyndon B. Johnson and David M. Barrett, *Lyndon B. Johnson's Vietnam Papers: A Documentary Collection* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1997), 436-437.

⁷² Kinnard, *The War Managers*, 125-126.

⁷³ Graham A. Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam: 1960-1968, Part 2* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, 2012), 52-53.

⁷⁴ Krepenevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 78-79, 93-94. The battle of Ap Bac was a resounding defeat for the ARVN forces in January of 1963. ARVN forces (three battalions and a company of APCs) sustained 200 casualties and five helicopters shot down against a battalion of VC. GEN Harkins and ADM Felt deemed this battle a success, which caused a media uproar.

authority for additional means with either the President or the Secretary of Defense. The ambiguous relationship between GEN Harkins and both ambassadors, when combined with the confused responsibility for interaction with the military government of South Vietnam, caused a conflict of purpose between MAC-V (within the Department of Defense) and the MAAG (within the Ambassador's staff and authority) until they were joined under Harkins. The actions of Ambassador Lodge confirmed that the ways in which the ends were executed were indeed managed by the Department of State, leaving GEN Harkins with limited authority and a strictly tactical role in allocating his advisors in support of South Vietnamese operations.⁷⁵

Lastly, GEN Harkins failed in his responsibility to provide accurate information to support his requests, a form of negotiation with political leadership.⁷⁶ Failure to achieve reportable and obvious progress by ARVN forces in pursuit of its counterinsurgency campaigns created lost confidence, creating a sense that Harkins leadership created the perception of a likely failure to craft and implement ways that would achieve the ends directed by the President. GEN Harkins touted the success of his approach, forecasting an easy victory and he did not request additional means in the form of ground troops. This undoubtedly gave his leadership the impression that he had the resources he needed to meet his objectives.⁷⁷

The perception of a failure to achieve the policy aim created political and policy risks for the policymaker, creating the conditions that resulted in a change in military leadership.⁷⁸ It was these political and policy risks that guided and constrained the policymaker in his deliberations with the Operational Artist, and constrained the Operational Artist in turn. GEN Harkins failed to

⁷⁵ Cosmas, *The Army in Vietnam*, 71; US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part IV*, 33.

⁷⁶ Schulimson, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam: 1960-1968, Part I*, 196.

⁷⁷ Krepenevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 86.

⁷⁸ Alan C. Lamborn, "Theory and the Politics in World Politics," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1997): 194-195.

account for and address the inevitable political ramifications for policy risk in the campaign he constructed in Vietnam. This failure resonated as a continuity with the fate of his successor.

Section 3: General Westmoreland's Tenure as the MAC-V Commander

General Westmoreland's Role as the MAC-V Commander

General Westmoreland officially assumed command of MAC-V after GEN Harkins retired, but he had experience as the commander in his transient role as the MAC-V Deputy Commander.⁷⁹ Westmoreland observed the difficulties experienced by GEN Harkins and learned from his challenges, applying those lessons during his tenure as the MAC-V Commander. Specifically, he noted the difficulties Harkins experienced with the ambassador and his optimistic assessments running aground in the media.⁸⁰ The promotion of GEN Westmoreland to MAC-V Commander coincided with the new administration's shift in the Vietnam strategy. Secretary McNamara forcibly retired GEN Harkins for his failure to recognize that the progress of the war created significant risks to his superiors' policies and political aims, ultimately challenging the legitimacy of the policy narrative.⁸¹ GEN Westmoreland's tenure directly coincided with an increase in authority and responsibility for success on the ground, and the transition to direct combat with the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong.⁸² This restructuring of ways supported with new means was the first indicator that GEN Westmoreland was a candidate for meeting the definition of an Operational Artist identified in this analysis.

The first significant action taken by GEN Westmoreland as the MAC-V Commander was a campaign plan that he proposed directly to the SECDEF and SECSTATE during the Honolulu

⁷⁹ Lewis Sorley, *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011), 72.

⁸⁰ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 65-66.

⁸¹ Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 93.

⁸² BDM Corporation, *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam*, vol. 3, *US Foreign Policy and Vietnam 1945-1975* (McLean, VA, 1979), 134-135; Johnson, *Vietnam Papers*, 165.

conference in June of 1964.⁸³ The concept came as a joint effort between the embassy and MAC-V, emphasizing a campaign focused on concentrating resources around Saigon to pacify the area and relieve pressure from the growing Viet Cong threat.⁸⁴ This was GEN Westmoreland's first step in constructing his ways to achieve the ends. Westmoreland continued to assert his case as an Operational Artist by immediately requesting additional means directly with the approving authority.

GEN Westmoreland negotiated with the South Vietnamese political leadership for their agreement for additional US forces to execute his campaign plan, and upon their agreement, drafted a plan in concert with the new ambassador, now retired-GEN Maxwell Taylor.⁸⁵ Westmoreland submitted his request to the JCS after a review and concurrence by CINCPAC, who then forwarded it to the SECDEF for approval.⁸⁶ This was not a direct negotiation with the approval authority for the means, but there was a clear distinction between this request and the efforts of GEN Harkins before GEN Westmoreland. GEN Westmoreland continued to make his case as an Operational Artist by acquiring greater control of Air Force assets in support of his operations.

GEN Westmoreland attempted to exert influence over air operations in both North and South Vietnam that began in earnest in 1965. He argued that bombing missions with effects in his AO demanded that he have some ability to influence and clear them in some capacity.⁸⁷ He specifically sought approval to direct all ROLLING THUNDER operations in South Vietnam, leaving the North Vietnam portion of the campaign under CINCPAC.⁸⁸ Admiral Sharp denied his

⁸³ US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part IV*, 79-81.

⁸⁴ Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam Part 2*, 77.

⁸⁵ US Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967, Part IV*, 60-61.

⁸⁶ Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam Part 2*, 85.

⁸⁷ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 122.

⁸⁸ Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam Part 2*, 228.

request as the CINCPAC did not desire to relinquish authority from his air and Navy component commanders or to split the air efforts.⁸⁹ Westmoreland persisted in his request for airpower and found an alternate route to achieve strategic assets for his operations.

In May of 1965 Westmoreland requested B-52 strikes within South Vietnam at targets his command designated.⁹⁰ This appeared as a significant shift in the authority over the mission set of this asset, and Westmoreland successfully negotiated their use with the JCS and CINCPAC.⁹¹ The Air Staff resisted this reallocation of their strategic resources and argued that they were not intended for Westmoreland's mission or targets.⁹² Westmoreland effectively requisitioned a resource typically designated solely for PACOM strategic targets, and applied it as an effective means to achieve his ends in South Vietnam.⁹³

Another critical point that solidified Westmoreland's standing as a true Operational Artist at this stage of the war were the public statements regarding his status and authority. Secretary of State Rusk referred to GEN Westmoreland as the leader taking orders directly from the President, while he outlined the defensive mission of ground forces in Vietnam to the press.⁹⁴ Rusk identified Westmoreland as having the authority to employ US forces in actions against North Vietnamese Forces as he saw fit, clearly identifying him as the decision authority responsible for employment, or ways. GEN Westmoreland assessed this statement as muddled at best, and he credited it with eventually damaging the administration and his credibility in the future.⁹⁵ This

⁸⁹ BDM Corporation, *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam*, vol. 6, 11-61; Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam Part 2*, 229.

⁹⁰ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 137.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 261-262.

⁹² BDM Corporation, *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam*, vol. 6, 11-62; Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam Part 2*, 299.

⁹³ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 76.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁵ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 136.

guidance was later clarified by SECSTATE through Ambassador Taylor, giving Westmoreland the authority and discretionary responsibility to conduct unilateral and combined operations in South Vietnam.⁹⁶ This shifted Westmoreland's operational approach from advisory and defensive efforts to an offensively oriented approach. General Westmoreland's expanding authority allowed him to exert more influence in negotiating the conduct of the war and eventually craft his operational approach, while continuing to request additional means to support it.⁹⁷

The approval of Westmoreland's negotiation for the 44-battalion proposal in July of 1965 was the defining event, transitioning the role of US forces from advisors to combat forces.⁹⁸ This request and grant for the means necessary to conduct ground combat provided GEN Westmoreland the opportunity to execute the ways of achieving the prescribed ends, because it allowed him significant control over operations. GEN Westmoreland owned limited capacity to use air power in support of ARVN forces and advisors to shape and influence ARVN operations before this point. With the advent of a significant footprint of US ground troops, Westmoreland attained the authority and resources to conduct unilateral combat operations. This was significantly different from GEN Harkins, who's limited authority to execute operations included even more limited means to do so. GEN Westmoreland requested additional troops several more times in 1966 and 1967 to increase combat power and accelerate the pace of the war in direct meetings with the SECDEF as well as the President both in and out of theater, although he fielded his requests formally through the PACOM chain of command.⁹⁹ A significant change in command structure of PACOM and MAC-V accompanied the transition to full-scale ground conflict.

⁹⁶ BDM Corporation, *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam*, vol. 6, 2-21.

⁹⁷ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 144.

⁹⁸ Johnson, Lyndon B. *Johnson's Vietnam Papers*, 270; Sorley, *Westmoreland: The General Who Lost Vietnam*, 85.

⁹⁹ Kinnard, *The War Managers*, 35-36; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 132-133.

The CINCPAC, Admiral Sharp at this point in the war, outlined what he believed to be a more effective command structure to prosecute the next phase of the war during the middle of 1965.¹⁰⁰ The CINCPAC still retained operational control of all components, but the COMUSMACV (MAC-V Commander) assumed the role of operational joint commander and simultaneously acted as the PACOM Army Component Commander. ADM Sharp delegated GEN Westmoreland the authority to command subordinate service component commands under MAC-V, which gave him full operational control of all assets in South Vietnam.¹⁰¹ CINCPAC retained ADCON authority over the subordinate service component commands in MAC-V and also allocated assets from PACOM's components to support MAC-V in a TACON role.¹⁰² This authority, coupled with the leverage and influence Westmoreland exerted on national leaders in requesting means, fits the mold of the Operational Artist identified in current joint doctrine and this analysis. GEN Westmoreland was still technically subordinate to CINCPAC, and he had to administratively submit his plans through PACOM and the JCS for approval, but the reduced scrutiny and added authority resulted in less interference from his chain of command. Essentially, Westmoreland negotiated above the JCS and CINCPAC, received approval, then conducted the formality by passing pre-approved requests through the CINCPAC and JCS. This allowed GEN Westmoreland a degree of creativity in applying Operational Art, given that he was free to request the means and construct the ways within his virtually autonomous theater of operations. A final example of the increased responsibility and assumption of GEN Westmoreland as the sole creative force behind the ways for achieving strategic objectives in South Vietnam was the reorganization of the pacification effort.

¹⁰⁰ Eckhardt, *Vietnam Studies: Command and Control*, 50.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 56.

¹⁰² Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam Part 2*, 319-321.

Multiple agencies had responsibility for the execution of the pacification strategy within the government outside of the control of MAC-V. The Department of State controlled these efforts up to 1966, but Secretary of Defense McNamara realized that the escalation of US government involvement put the different agencies and departments at risk of working at cross-purposes from one another.¹⁰³ The SECDEF proposed delegating the sole authority to manage the pacification effort and, in effect, all agencies within South Vietnam to the COMUSMACV in 1966.¹⁰⁴ The Secretary of State and his staff met this proposal with stiff resistance because of the significant control they would concede to MAC-V over civilian agencies.¹⁰⁵ President Johnson was wary of ceding civilian control to MAC-V as well, but he ultimately relented due to stagnant pacification efforts.¹⁰⁶ This added authority put a significant majority of the elements of the United States' national power under the auspices of MAC-V.¹⁰⁷ The ambassador retained a degree of oversight over all government functions in country, but this shift in authority and responsibility allowed GEN Westmoreland to fully integrate all agencies into his operational approach and fully realize his role as an Operational Artist. The most critical analysis of GEN Westmoreland as an Operational Artist is his adjustments to the realities of a command structure that was not adjusted to the reality of the war.

GEN Westmoreland used the JCS structure to back his requests for resources and the implementation of his plans. He was not given complete control of everything within his area of

¹⁰³ Thomas Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support* (Washington, DC: US Army Center for Military History, 1982), 36.

¹⁰⁴ Scoville, *Reorganizing for Pacification Support*, 34.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰⁶ Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam Part 2*, 459-460.

¹⁰⁷ BDM Corporation, *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam*, vol. 5, 5-50.

interest, although he did have significant control over his area of *operations*.¹⁰⁸ His workaround to the rigid, compartmentalized structure within PACOM was constant negotiation with the JCS, SECDEF, and the President to construct ways and request means to achieve their ends.¹⁰⁹ This is the essence of the Operational Artist, if not the truest form. GEN Harkins was an example of an Operational Artist in that he had some bearing on the arrangement of tactical actions with the advisors he commanded. However, Harkins had little real authority to achieve strategic objectives, nor was he seen as responsible for their achievement, which was demonstrated by his unheeded opposition to the US Government's support of the Diem coup. GEN Westmoreland was given additional, but not complete authority over the Southeast Asian theater while he assumed operational control with responsibility for all of South Vietnam. The key difference between Harkins and Westmoreland is that Harkins attempted to negotiate for means and implement ways, but the ambassador overruled him. GEN Westmoreland successfully negotiated for the means directly with the President and SECDEF and implemented the ways when the US presence in Vietnam transitioned from an advisory effort to a ground war.

Analysis of General Westmoreland's Application of the Operational Art

The debate over the nature of GEN Westmoreland's apocryphal "attrition strategy" centers around his unwillingness to see that conventional warfare had no place in Vietnam and realize an operational approach of counterinsurgency was more appropriate.¹¹⁰ This

¹⁰⁸ JP 1-02, 25. "Area of Interest – That area of concern to the commander, including the area of influence, areas adjacent thereto, and extending into enemy territory to the objectives of current or planned operations. This area also includes areas occupied by enemy forces who could jeopardize the accomplishment of the mission." "Area of Operations – An operational area defined by the joint force commander for land and maritime forces. Areas of operation do not typically encompass the entire operational area of the joint force commander, but should be large enough for component commanders to accomplish their missions and protect their forces."

¹⁰⁹ Gregory A. Daddis, *Westmoreland's War: Reassessing American Strategy in Vietnam* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 72.

¹¹⁰ Sorely, *Westmoreland*, 73; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 19-20; H.R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1997), 333; Krepenovich, *The Army and Vietnam*, 164-165; Daddis, *Westmoreland's War*, 74-81.

misunderstanding stems from the structure of Westmoreland's approach coupled with media reporting that focused on and proliferated the "attrition strategy."

Westmoreland identified the concept of his operations and tied it to the request he made for additional troops in June of 1965. He explained this in a message to the CINPAC and JCS, stating, "my concept is basically to employ US forces, together with Vietnamese airborne and marine battalions of the general reserve, against the hardcore North Vietnam/Viet Cong forces in reaction and search and destroy operations, and thus permit the concentration of Vietnamese troops in the heavily populated areas." He added: "We will be conducting mobile warfare from fixed and defended bases. Some of these bases will be major logistics centers at ports and airfields, such as Chu Lai and Cam Ranh. Others will be tactical bases such as An Khe or Pleiku. The tactical bases will move as necessary, and that may be with some frequency as the battle develops."¹¹¹ This methodology clearly identified a dual pronged-approach, with a focus on main-force threats with conventional US Forces and a population-focused approach for ARVN forces. GEN Westmoreland's justification for this approach and the additional resources was based on ARVN's failure to address the main force threat to this point in the war.¹¹² Westmoreland had not fallen prey to the mistakes made by Harkins with inaccurate, overly optimistic reports and instead, took a pessimistic, cautionary tone in his assessments. GEN Westmoreland further elaborated his intent with a phased campaign plan.

COMUSMACV crafted three phases designed to reverse the losing trend assessed in 1965. Phase I focused on regaining the initiative with US forces and establishing a foothold to set conditions for Phase II. Phase II was a transition to the offense by US and ARVN forces in prioritized areas to destroy enemy forces and reestablish pacification operations. Phase III focused on the destruction of enemy bases and main force elements for up to a year and a half

¹¹¹ Cosmas, *The Army in Vietnam*, 236.

¹¹² Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 99-100.

after Phase II's completion. This plan demonstrated the phasing and application of both conventional and counterinsurgency efforts.¹¹³ The only part of the campaign not mentioned, but implied through all three phases, was the building of combat power of ARVN forces to sustain the gains achieved throughout the campaign.

GEN Westmoreland assessed that the Viet Cong waged a "war of attrition" based off of ARVN's crippling losses at the behest of the Viet Cong.¹¹⁴ A prime example of this was the attack on the outpost of Ba Gia in the Quang Ngai Province.¹¹⁵ This outpost held three ARVN battalions, suffering one battalion virtually destroyed from an attack by a Viet Cong Regiment.¹¹⁶ This and other battles of the North Vietnamese summer offensive in 1965 painted a clear picture of the tide of the war for GEN Westmoreland.¹¹⁷ The efforts of ARVN were not achieving any measurable success, so the only viable option for GEN Westmoreland was to request and apply additional US combat power.¹¹⁸

GEN Westmoreland followed an approach that recognized the political constraints imposed by US policymakers. He was not allowed to attack main force or Viet Cong units in Laos or Cambodia, nor was he able to conduct ground operations or control bombing operations in North Vietnam due to the possibility of provoking China into entering the war.¹¹⁹ GEN Westmoreland used sound judgment in allocating ARVN forces in the pacification efforts due to their cultural knowledge and the reduced combat power necessary for counterinsurgency operations. These realities initiated the use of superior US mobility and firepower against the

¹¹³ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 135.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 153.

¹¹⁵ Neil Sheehan, *The Pentagon Papers* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1971), 409.

¹¹⁶ Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and the War in Vietnam*, 294; Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 136.

¹¹⁷ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 139.

¹¹⁸ Samuel Zaffiri, *Westmoreland: A Biography of General William C. Westmoreland* (New York, NY: Morrow, 1994), 140.

¹¹⁹ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 112, 411.

main force elements threatening Saigon from Laos and Cambodia. US forces had operational permission to pursue North Vietnamese units to the border and provide a guard force for ARVN forces around population centers. These efforts aimed to buy time and space for the pacification efforts of ARVN.

GEN Westmoreland stated his understanding of the nature of the Vietnam War in his message to his subordinate commanders in September of 1965, stating that the “war in Vietnam is a political as well as military war. It is political because the ultimate goal is to regain the loyalty and cooperation of the people, and to create conditions which allow the people to go about their normal lives in peace and security.”¹²⁰

The escalating troop requests each consecutive year after 1965 to 1967 indicated Westmoreland’s growing realization of the scope of the conflict. While perceived as inaccurate forecasting for negotiated means, Westmoreland tied these requests directly to political pressure to hasten the progress of the war. The success of GEN Westmoreland’s approach appeared in viewing the conflict through the eyes of the North Vietnamese, which demonstrated that, despite growing American public discontent with the progress of the war, the United States was achieving its intended effects.

The North Vietnamese engaged in the same debate that US leadership struggled with in late 1967 and early 1968. Hanoi leadership assessed that they were bleeding combat power with little gain to show for it, and conceded that they had lost the initiative in South Vietnam.¹²¹ The genesis of the Tet Offensive was the need to regain the initiative in a war the North Vietnamese perceived they were losing. They had regressed from repeated victories early in 1964 and 1965 to sustaining heavy losses from the influx of American combat power.¹²² The Saigon government

¹²⁰ Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*, 75.

¹²¹ Karnow, *Vietnam*, 467.

¹²² Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam Part 3*, 132.

regained credibility under the time and space provided by Westmoreland's operational approach. The North Vietnamese developed two objectives, the first of which was the complete destruction of ARVN forces and the second was the destruction of a significant portion of US troop strength.¹²³ The Tet Offensive of 1968, considered a tactical victory for the United States, ultimately devolved into a strategic and political failure inside the United States. A primary reason for this outcome was the strategic messaging by GEN Westmoreland, his most critical failure as an Operational Artist in this analysis.

GEN Westmoreland remained consistently even-keeled in his assessments from 1966 to 1968, citing the need for more troops to maintain the gains achieved by forces more so than needing them to prevent a loss, despite the political pressure to accelerate the war effort. GEN Westmoreland took an appropriate approach to this requirement by requesting more combat power to achieve these ends. GEN Westmoreland made a final request for additional troops in 1967 to support the complete blocking of the Ho Chi Minh Trail, but the administration ultimately rejected it due to the upcoming election year.¹²⁴ This forced GEN Westmoreland to continue the campaign he had formulated in 1966 with the intent of continued, gradual progress. The overall troop strength continued to increase through Westmoreland's tenure, reaching its peak of 540,000 under GEN Abrams (Westmoreland's successor) command of MAC-V in 1968.¹²⁵ The political pressure to achieve decisive results led the administration to pressure GEN Westmoreland to champion the war effort publicly and attest to the significant progress made in early 1968.¹²⁶

¹²³ Cosmas, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and The War in Vietnam Part 3*, 133.

¹²⁴ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 148, 230; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 520-521.

¹²⁵ BDM Corporation, *A Study of Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam*, vol. 5, 6-1; Karnow, *Vietnam*, 696-697.

¹²⁶ William M. Hammond, *Public Affairs: The Military and the Media, 1962-1968* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1990), 333.

GEN Westmoreland addressed the media to assist President Johnson in reinforcing support for the war effort with the US electorate. GEN Westmoreland's assessment painted a picture of success and the imminent transition to a "phase down" of American units and ARVN control.¹²⁷ This view was in stark contrast to his previously unwavering assessment of a prolonged conflict that would only advance slowly with great effort.¹²⁸ These comments indirectly upended the war effort, when they were juxtaposed with the Tet Offensive that occurred almost immediately after this public assessment. The ensuing fallout led to the complete loss of credibility of GEN Westmoreland and the administration, ultimately turning the tide of the war for North Vietnam that led eventually to the 1973 peace accords.¹²⁹ This served as an essential critique in the analysis of his role as an Operational Artist. His failure was to negotiate for and maintain the support of the people through expectation management and cautious assessments, which is the essence of strategic communication and durable war narratives.¹³⁰

The media did not sabotage GEN Westmoreland. His interaction with the media and strategic messaging was a facet of the role of the Operational Artist that serves as criteria in this analysis. Former Army Officer and Military Historian Greg Daddis argued that GEN Westmoreland was doomed to implement a failed campaign because of unattainable strategic goals tied to the inability of the South Vietnamese to achieve their responsibilities in the war effort and gain the support of the South Vietnamese people. Westmoreland had failed, Daddis argues, "not because of some blind faith in attrition, but rather because of the incongruities within the widely-held conviction that US military power could remedy social and political ills abroad. When the reality of the war discredited this belief, wounded critics, still true believers in

¹²⁷ Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 234.

¹²⁸ Daddis, *Westmoreland's War*, 88.

¹²⁹ Sorely, *Westmoreland*, 177.

¹³⁰ Kubiak, *War Narratives*, 159; JP 5-0, *Joint Operation Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 2011), II-9.

American supremacy, turned to Westmoreland, blaming him for a lost war.” Daddis goes on to attribute the Westmoreland’s failure to a lack of “strategic language” and the lack of a medium to communicate his strategic message in this complex environment.¹³¹

There is merit to this argument, but it relieves the Operational Artist of his responsibility to achieve strategic objectives with creativity in what appears to be an unwinnable or unsustainable conflict. Westmoreland’s reflections on his performance admit a shortcoming in strategic communication, and he admits that he should have done a better job communicating the imminent threat he anticipated, which eventually manifested in the Tet Offensive.¹³²

This analysis posits that the role of the Operational Artist and the essence of his inherent creativity is to craft language and narratives in addition to operational approaches that achieve or support strategic objectives. These narratives are critical in achieving and maintaining the elusive objective of public support for a war of choice like Vietnam. The evaluative criteria of authority, responsibility, and strategic communication refine the definition of Operational Art and give utility to the definition, which is proven through the preceding case study. The application of these criteria to the case study is useful because it demonstrates how the title of a Commander can remain constant (COMUSMACV in the case of Vietnam), but the character of that title and its execution are dependent upon its congruence with the criteria. This benefits future Operational Artists and their staffs by guiding their planning and actions with an understanding of their ability to craft operations and truly integrate ends, ways, and means. More importantly, it highlights the importance of understanding the impact of strategic communications on the ability to influence the means required to employ military forces. GEN Westmoreland’s shortcomings in narrative and communication plagued his predecessor and was repeated by leaders in the recent past.

¹³¹ Daddis, *Westmoreland’s War*, 91.

¹³² Westmoreland, *A Soldier Reports*, 411.

Section 4: Implications and Conclusion

Implications for Future Operational Artists and Their Staffs

The skill of the Operational Artist in the art of strategic communication and crafting narratives to support the political legitimacy of his operational approaches to achieve strategic objectives is vital to maintaining support for the war. This, in turn, sustains the credibility of the Operational Artist and the presidential administration. This is probably the most underdeveloped and/or underemphasized requirement for the Operational Artist, yet it appears to be the recurring theme in assessing Operational Artists' failures in their roles in recent history. Stanley McChrystal's relief as ISAF commanders in Afghanistan serves as a present-day example of failed strategic communication with superiors, while GEN Petraeus's success in implementing the Iraq surge and maintaining political support for the war serves as a positive example. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates explained his views and assessments of these Operational Artists during his tenure as the SECDEF and provided analysis that emphasized the importance of strategic communication with political leadership.

GEN McChrystal's relief is primarily attributed to the *Rolling Stones* article that caused political upheaval in the White House and the media. This fallout was a result of McChrystal's failure in strategic communication, specifically with the media and consequently, the public, but there was more to his relief than the article alone.¹³³ Gates noted that the political fallout for McChrystal was unsalvageable because McChrystal did not have the support of his political leadership, specifically the President and Vice President, before this incident. Gates cited President Obama's conversation with him after the publication of the article, with the President saying, "I don't have a sense it's going well in Afghanistan. He [McChrystal] doesn't seem to be

¹³³ Marybeth P. Ulrich, "The General Stanley McChrystal Affair: A Case Study in Civil-Military Relations," *Parameters* 41, no. 1 (2011): 86.

making progress. Maybe his strategy is not really working.”¹³⁴ Gates noted that McChrystal did not try to defend his lack of progress nor the contents of the article, which was, Gates stated, “The last of several missteps by the general in the political minefield, a risky battlespace where he had limited combat experience.”¹³⁵ According to McChrystal’s own account, he did not indicate in any way he had an inkling of the President’s lack of support for his (McChrystal’s) strategy. Instead, McChrystal implies that the fallout and his resignation were a result of the article alone, which is incongruent with Gates’ account.¹³⁶ Hew Strachan analyzed the lack of rebuttal and assessed that it was a silent protest from the lack of strategic guidance from McChrystal’s political leadership.¹³⁷ McChrystal did stumble in Strategic Communication prior to this point when he made the mistake of speaking on policy and strategy when the President was still considering his options, which led to the impression of an eventual loss of support from his political leadership.¹³⁸ This clearly shows GEN McChrystal’s failure to communicate an effective operational approach and gain the confidence of his political leadership through engagement and strategic communication.¹³⁹ However, it also shows that Gates failed to give him guidance and inform him that he was losing support from the President.

Gates noted in his memoir that the President specifically requested that Gates ensure that McChrystal provide distinct options, with counterinsurgency as only one of those options, with corresponding troop footprints, to which Gates concurred and recommended they review

¹³⁴ Gates, *Duty*, 488.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 491.

¹³⁶ Stanley A. McChrystal, *My Share of the Task: A Memoir* (New York, NY: Portfolio/Penguin 2014), 386-387.

¹³⁷ Hew Strachan, “Strategy or Alibi? Obama, McChrystal and the Operational Level of War,” *Survival* 52, no. 5 (2010): 157-158.

¹³⁸ James Kitfield, “McChrystal: A Warrior Undone,” *National Journal* (June 2010), accessed April 21, 2017, <https://lumen.cgsccarl.com/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/docview/521196927?accountid=28992>.

¹³⁹ Hew Strachan, “Strategy Or Alibi?” 177.

McChrystal's progress.¹⁴⁰ The subsequent chapters in Gates' memoir do not reflect the SECDEF relaying this guidance to McChrystal, but merely telling him to continue with his counterinsurgency strategy and assess its progress.¹⁴¹ Gates met with the president in November of 2009 to discuss options and cited Vice President Biden's Counterterrorism option and a single option from McChrystal, which was a troop increase for counterinsurgency.¹⁴² This lack of guidance to the Operational Artist kept him uninformed of the president's desire for varied options and ultimately contributed to the policymaker's (in this case, the president) loss of faith in GEN McChrystal.

The lessons learned from McChrystal serve as examples of Operational Artists who failed to fully embrace the creativity required to successfully communicate the progress and success of their operational approaches to civilian leadership. A critical point here is that Operational Artists cannot succeed, regardless of battlefield success, if they cannot garner support from political leadership. The onus is not completely on McChrystal because, in Gates's words, he did not have the support from him (Gates) or the President.

Secretary Gates cited Petraeus's cautious optimism and repeated warnings immediately after he achieved success with the Iraq surge. GEN Petraeus emphasized that progress in the surge, albeit slow, was achieved by Iraqi security forces and American efforts and remained fragile at best.¹⁴³ GEN Petraeus set the bar for progress low and easily exceeded expectations. He did not succumb to the political pressure of overselling progress in Iraq, nor did he declare that the gains achieved were irreversible. Petraeus successfully built an unforeseen setback into his

¹⁴⁰ Gates, *Duty*, 357.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 356, 485.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 369, 378-379.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 70.

narrative, fully anticipating this occurrence as a possibility and grafting it into his messaging.¹⁴⁴ This would avoid the fallout of a Tet Offensive equivalent, and this narrative came into play during the particularly bloody month of July 2007 with a record number of security incidents in Iraq.¹⁴⁵ Petraeus also accounted for increased violence during an episode in 2008 as a “desperation attempt” by insurgents in anticipation of the joint congressional testimony with Ambassador Crocker that took place on April 8th and 9th.¹⁴⁶ Petraeus emphasized the importance of communication with his leadership and cites it as one of the most important tenets of his leadership philosophy.¹⁴⁷

This is a most critical lesson for future Operational Artists who wage campaigns in limited wars with tenuous public support and resources. They must build anticipated failures and cautious optimism into their narratives to maintain the support of their superiors and the public. Gates supported Petraeus because his narrative gave him the flexibility and time to achieve success, which the SECDEF could openly support. This is the learned skill of managing strategic communications to sustain the legitimacy of the policy narrative in the rough and tumble world of public and media perceptions of success and failure in operations.

Conclusion

The arc of this analysis reveals the most critical considerations for any future Operational Artist and their subordinate staffs to be successful. The Operational Artist must take great care in negotiating for the means necessary to institute their approach, and this is not always in the form of tangible assets. The contrast between GEN Harkins and GEN Westmoreland reveals the need to negotiate for the appropriate level of authority and responsibility to implement an operational

¹⁴⁴ Emile Simpson, “On Strategic Leadership: An Interview with David H. Petraeus, General,” *Parameters* 45, no. 4 (2015): 77-78.

¹⁴⁵ *Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations*, 110th Cong., 1st sess., September 11, 2007, 20-21; Gates, *Duty*, 70.

¹⁴⁶ Gates, *Duty*, 232.

¹⁴⁷ Simpson, “Interview with David H. Petraeus,” 76.

approach and maintain control over their battlespace. GEN Harkins performance cautions future Operational Artists on the risk of appearing overly optimistic in appraisals to senior leadership, which will likely cause a loss of confidence and failure in strategic messaging when setbacks occur. He failed to negotiate for additional means to reinforce his approach, but his failure to negotiate for the authority to support the implementation of his operational approach and ability to achieve strategic objectives was just as critical. His lapse in strategic communication encompasses his inability to negotiate with political leadership as well as craft a durable narrative that bought him time and space to succeed.

GEN Westmoreland maintained a cautiously optimistic tone and continued to negotiate for more means to achieve the emerging strategic objective of winning the war on a truncating timetable. This translated to a failing strategy and the political requirement to champion progress in Vietnam before the enemy's counter-reaction in the form of the Tet Offensive. Future Operational Artists might use this example as a lesson in building anticipated setbacks and enemy surges into their narrative. The credibility of the Operational Artist, the ability to communicate strategically with the population and civilian leadership, and the authority coupled with inherent responsibility to craft operational approaches within policy constraints are the most important traits of an Operational Artist.

The commanders constructed their campaigns and strategies by negotiating for means through direct discourse with political leadership. This ability to leverage their creativity to construct approaches exemplifies the "art" in Operational Art. Leaders at subordinate levels can arrange tactical actions, but they cannot develop strategies, campaigns, or operations to employ military forces. This is the responsibility of the Operational Artist, under most operational scenarios, will reside at a JTF or COCOM command level. The criteria used here demonstrate an Operational Artist who is in a position to negotiate for these means with the political/policy approval authority. The ADP 3-0 definition of Operational Art is too inclusive and does not

subordinate itself to the higher authority of joint doctrine.¹⁴⁸ It does not adhere to the spirit or history of operational art, which identifies it as the realm of military leaders who have the authority and responsibility to wage war within the constraints of policy given the means that they request from political leadership. The true Operational Artist is only bounded by policymakers, their constraints, and his/her creativity.

¹⁴⁸ JP 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013), VI-3. “If conflicts arise between the contents of joint doctrine and the contents of Service or multi-Service doctrine, joint doctrine takes precedence for the activities of joint forces unless CJCS has provided more current and specific guidance.”

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